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ABSTRACT

This document offers an overview of the Houston READ Commission (HRC), a nonprofit urban literacy coalition created by the Mayor and City Council in the Greater Houston area. It describes how the coalition of community organizations first came together in 1988, in response to a survey's finding that there are over one million functionally illiterate adults in the Houston area. The partnership of teachers, facilitators, administrative and program staff, and volunteers views community-based education as the key to a literate community and that collaborative learning provides the foundation for community-based education. In 1995 the Houston READ Commission, with its 96 partner agencies, was the largest urban literacy coalition in the United States. Collaboration, goals, and highlights of HRC milestones are discussed. (NKA)

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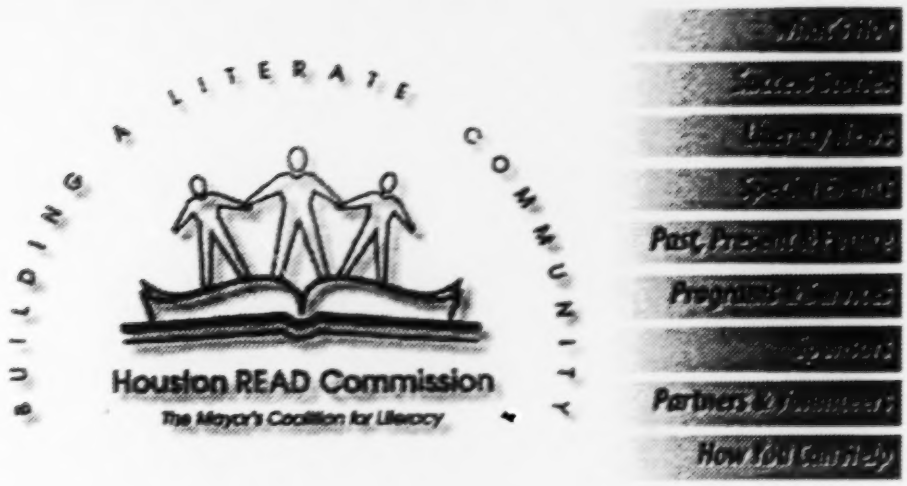

5330 Griggs Road, #75
Houston, Texas 77021

The Houston READ Commission, a nonprofit urban literacy coalition, created by the Mayor and City Council to coordinate adult and family literacy services in the Greater Houston area.

HOUSTON READ COMMISSION PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

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Houston READ Commission

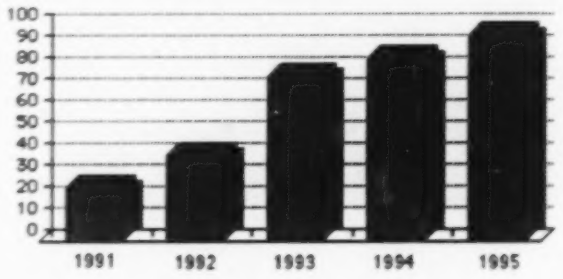
Past, Present & Future

Houston READ Commission 1995 in Review

Executive Summary Overview

As a broad-based coalition of 100 community organizations united in their efforts to promote and expand adult and family literacy services in Greater Houston, the Houston READ Commission (HRC) is the city's driving force in the fight against illiteracy. Serving over 53,000 learners annually, this coalition of literacy service providers and key support agencies has afforded a coordinated approach to raising the literacy levels of Houstonians since 1988. HRC provides its partners with technical assistance, access to pilot programs, referral services, follow-up services, literacy awareness campaigns, collaborative funding opportunities, and training for tutors and instructors.

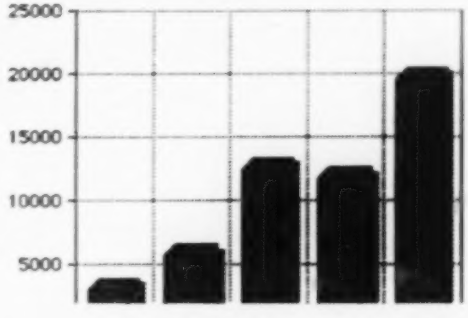
Number of Partners in Literacy Coalition



According to the Texas Adult Literacy Survey, there are one million functionally illiterate adults in the Greater Houston area. A great many of these are parents; more than 80 percent of HRC's adult learners are parents of school-age children. Their lack of literacy skills not only severely limits the quality of their own lives and their roles in our society, but also limits the development of literacy skills in their children.

As a partnership of teachers, facilitators, administrative and program staff, and volunteers, we view community-based education as the key to a literate community. Collaborative learning provides the foundation for community-based education. HRC's programs empower students to develop essential learning skills. For those failed by the traditional system, we provide an alternative learning environment that works to rebuild confidence and self-esteem. We do not compete with traditional learning, but rather complement the traditional education system by providing necessary solutions for at-risk youth and adult learners.

Number of Calls to Helpline



The Houston READ Commission: The Mayor's Coalition for Literacy has seen tremendous growth in service over the past five years. The number of learners served has increased by 395% from 10,867 to 53,840; the number of calls to the

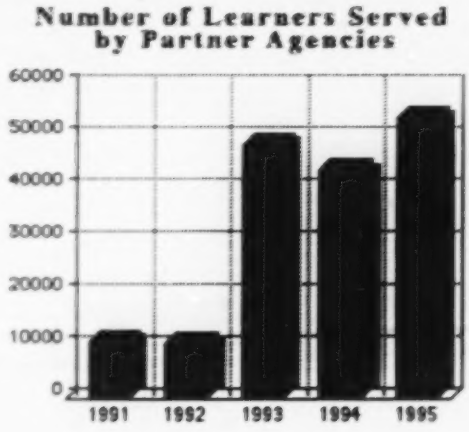
10,867 to 53,840; the number of calls to the Helpline has increased by 434% from 3,819 to 20,401; and the number of community-based providers and partners has increased 284% from 25 to 96. The need is great! This is why the Houston READ Commission is working to raise the literacy levels of Houstonians to ensure a better quality of life for our citizenship.

Highlights

In 1995, the Houston READ Commission, with its 96 partner agencies, was the largest urban literacy coalition in America.

A record 53,840 learners were served; an increase of 21%.

With a $100,000 Challenge Grant from the city and support from local citizens, corporations, and foundations, HRC was able to raise the matching $900,000 in less than six months thereby, increasing funding for literacy in Houston by $1 million. (Please turn to page 15 in your annual report for more information.) This challenge created a new system of grants developed to provide seed money to member providers for improving the quality and breath of services. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the mayor and city council for supporting the expansion of community literacy support for HRC's providers.



On page 13 and 14 you will find the financial statement produced by HRC's auditors Grant Thornton for a 15-month audit ending June 30, 1995. Total assets were $216,011 as were the total liabilities and fund balance. Total revenues were $1,562,945 with $1,515,764 in expenses. The fund balance at the beginning of the year was $68,752 and at the end of the year the fund balance was $130,381.

In 1994, $1,035,307 was distributed as provider assistance. In 1995, $1,659,998 was distributed for a total increase in provider assistance of 60%.

Of the 1,929 students served in READ Commission demonstration sites, 80% reached their goals or are continuing to attend classes.

Calls to HRC's Information and Referral System (I&R) increased by 130% for a total of 20,401 calls and requests. HRC's I&R System continues to operate in partnership with the Houston Community College System, tracking data on students and volunteers and maintaining up-to-date information on literacy providers.

In 1995, the Houston READ Commission, in partnership with the Houston Community College System, again received the largest National Literacy Act (NLA) grant in Texas,

College System, again received the largest National Literacy Act (NLA) grant in Texas, shared by the largest number of adult students. The NLA Consortium generated over $839,000 to community-based literacy provider members. (Please turn to page 11 in your annual report for more information.)

Last year, the Houston READ Commission was honored as a recipient of a grant from the prestigious Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. During its first six months of operation, the program served 24 families in addition to the 50 adults regularly served at the Good Neighbor Learning Center.

HRC Making Change Happen at Local, State, & National Levels

In recognition of the importance of collaboration at all levels, HRC has been working to build coalitions at local, state, and national levels. In 1995, under HRC's leadership, the Texas Urban Literacy Coalition was created. This network of urban literacy coalitions includes as charter members the Urban Literacy Coalitions of Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, Lubbock, and San Antonio. By working together, we were able to access state adult education funding for more community-based organizations in Houston. This Task Force has developed a Workforce Development/Literacy Plan for our region to help ensure that all who need basic skills training can enroll and succeed in high quality programs. Because this enables HRC can work more closely with the city, we are excited to be a partner in workforce development. Margaret Doughty, HRC Executive Director has been appointed to the local workforce development board for the Gulf Coast Region. HRC has a taskforce partnership with the local PICS, the Greater Houston Partnership, the National Alliance of Business, and local business and community providers.

Literacy AmeriCorps is part of a national project started in September 1994 in four urban areas across the nation: Houston, New Orleans, Pittsburgh, and Seattle. The program is funded through the Corporation for National Service and requires a significant local match of both cash and in-kind donations. Last year alone, 72 Literacy AmeriCorps members gave over 100,000 hours of community service helping nearly 4,000 adults in basic skills and English language programs.

HRC currently coordinates 21 area sites at which AmeriCorps members work with adult and family literacy programs teaching reading and math skills and providing homework assistance to children. HRC recently submitted a proposal to the Corporation for National Service to become the lead agency for the national project, enabling HRC to serve as the coordinator and fiscal manager for the AmeriCorps programs across the county. The Mayor supported us in this endeavor and we are grateful.

1996 Goals

As you have read, the Houston READ Commission is the leading urban literacy coalition in the country. Through innovative collaborations and partnerships, HRC and its providers reach over 53,000 learners annually.

We know that to continue to be on the cutting edge as a service provider and coordinator of literacy services, HRC must be prepared for the future. This is why HRC has undertaken a bold plan, Excellence 2000, to look at the structure of the organization and determine the best course to move the mayoris coalition for literacy in to the next century.

Excellence 2000 committees are busy evaluating current operations and forming recommenda-tions for the agencyís long term planning process that will be designed to help HRC operate with the best possible and affordable business practices.

In this process, the Community Relations & Provider Committee surveyed 217 constituents. Respondents commenting positively on the HRC's literacy services and programs mentioned the high quality of learner-centered instruction, diversity in approaches, meeting community needs, efforts to improve learnersí self-esteem, the quality of GED classes, and the distribution of books to the community, among many other topics. Among the public awareness and advocacy mentions, positive comments were noted about good name recognition through the mass media, lobbying activities, working with politicians and business leaders, and spreading the message that literacy is a vehicle to empowerment.

The Excellence 2000 results are not without challenges. Challenges to HRCís provider and partnership relations included the need to work more closely with schools, businesses and community groups, and providing more technical assistance and resources to providers. In order to meet these challenges, HRC must increase funding to:

provide computers and computer links between HRC and providers; install a telephone system that will handle the volume of calls received; provide additional technical assistance to providers; establish better links with local schools, businesses, and community groups; and, raise additional funds for providers.

We plan to publish the final results of HRC's Excellence 2000 plans this summer. Recommendations will be included along with an action plan detailing how recommendations will be acted upon.

HOUSTON READ COMMISSION

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The Houston READ Commission || 5330 Griggs Road #75 || Houston, Texas 77021-3715
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Houston READ Commission
Past, Present & Future

Had the HRC not existed last year, these things could not have taken place:

- In 1994, 43,766 adult learners in Greater Houston would not have been served through classes provided by the HRC and its coalition of literacy providers. Approximately 78% of students served directly by HRC have reached their goals or are continuing to attend classes.
- The Chinese Community Center, The Chicano Family Learning Center and the Latino Learning Center's English as a Second Language (ESL) classes would not have operated, and 200 adults would have been deprived of ESL and basic skills instruction.
- SER, The International Center for Language Studies and Catholic Charities would not have received JTPA 8% funding, and 150 students would have been deprived of ESL and basic skills instruction.
- Over $2,000,000 in city, state, private and federal funding would not have been accessed by literacy providers.
- Community-based literacy providers would not have gained the right to compete for state adult education funding. Texas Education Code changes passed on May 29, 1995 with the support of Texas Senator Rodney Ellis provide direct and equitable access to $1,000,000 in state funds.
- Substantial resources that could not have been accessed individually by literacy providers were brought to the city as a result of successful efforts requiring a collaborative or coordinated effort. These resources in 1995 included: $600,000 in National Literacy Act (NLA) funding, $150,000 in Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funding, $80,000 in Texas Education Agency funding, $70,000 in Housing and Urban Development funding and $240,000 in AmeriCorps (Department of Education) funding.
- A Benchmark System for measuring program quality would not have been developed.
- 250 volunteers would not have been trained as literacy tutors and 650 literacy instructors would not have received professional development to improve their instructional skills through the Teacher Training Institute.
- Over 2,500 calls to the LITERACY HELPLINE for program referral would have gone unanswered. The HELPLINE received a total of 12,625 calls in 1994 for program referral, volunteer and general information.

- 100 women would not have received job-oriented basic skills instruction, mentoring and job development through the Women Moving Up program.

- Twenty-four homeless shelters would not have received assistance in assessing and meeting the literacy needs of their residents.

- The work of the HRC and its providers and the continuing support of Houston's City Council would not have resulted in the "Houston READ Commission Model," which received national recognition for its catalyst role in raising standards and coordinating resources to eradicate illiteracy.

- The HRC coalition would not have become part of the state, national and international urban literacy coalitions, playing a leading role in improving the quality of literacy instruction through implementation of performance standards.

- The National Alliance of Business (NAB) would not have selected Houston as the city for its Business/Education Workforce Development Forum. The HRC was recognized by NAB as a leading example of a collaborative, community-based literacy effort in the United States.

- Mayor Bob Lanier would not have been selected as one of only three 1995 Women's Literacy Pioneer Award recipients for his advancement of the cause of women's literacy as demonstrated through his support of the HRC.

- Mayor Bob Lanier and City Council would not have doubled the HRC's funding from the city for 1995-96 to challenge funding agencies in the city to provide matching funds.

- The HRC would not have been selected to receive a team of 30 Literacy AmeriCorps members through a grant awarded by the National Institute for Literacy as part of President Clinton's National Service Initiative. Corps members are working in 15 community-based literacy sites throughout Greater Houston providing literacy instruction, substance abuse and life skills training, and independent living assistance. The 1994 team received a "Leadership in Action" award from Leadership Houston for its outstanding commitment to the community.

- The HRC has been notified of approved State and Federal funding through 1996: $300,000 in JTPA funding, $338,000 in AmeriCorps funding, $450,000 in NLA funding, $38,000 in Texas Houston and Community Affairs Funding (life skills to battered women) and $30,000 from the Department of Houston and Development (literacy services to homeless shelters).

- 19 community-based organizations would not have received National Literacy Act funding. For the majority, this is their major source of funds. Service levels would have been reduced or eliminated, and 3,000 adults would have been deprived of ESL and basic skills instruction.

- There would have been no Houston or community-based literacy organization (CBO) representation in the Statewide Consortium for Curriculum and Staff Development.

Partners in this consortium include: Baylor University, El Paso Community College, Houston READ Commission, Southwest Texas State University, Texas A&M University and The University of Texas.

- There would have been no Houston or CBO representation on the Performance Measures Group currently developing performance standards and measures for the basic skills component of the Texas Workforce Development System.
- There would have been no coordination of literacy services in Houston.

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